Studies in Patrology IV:

Apostolic Fathers

I. Introduction

By the end of the first century, all the Holy Books of the New Testament were written. But at that time, still were not all compiled into one Holy Book as it is today. However, all the churches in the world during that time accepted these Holy Books as the Pillar of Faith and the Christian life that was inspired by God through the Apostles who were the means used by the Holy Spirit. "For no prophetic message ever came just from the human will, but people were under control of the Holy Spirit as they spoke the message that came from God." (II Peter 1:21)

From the beginning the Christian Church was more conservative in acceptance of any book as prophetic even than the Jewish Church itself. Early, there were some writings found in certain manuscripts but the Church did not accept them as prophetic books, for example, very early manuscripts contained, in addition to the Holy Books of the New Testament, two books, which belonged to St Clement, the Romanian.

Sinaiticus manuscript is one of the very early manuscripts that were discovered by the scholar C. Tischendrof (1844-1859) near the Monastery of St Catherine in the Sinai Mountain in Egypt. It was transcribed in the fourth century. Sinaiticus included in addition to the Holy Books of the Old and New Testament, Letter of Barnabas and The Shepherd of Hermas.

However, the Moritorian Law excluded Letter of Barnabas and The Shepherd of Hermas from the Prophetic Books of the New Testament. The Church, though, considered these books as of great value and benefit for the believers' life and the growth of their spirituality. The twenty-seven Holy Books of the New Testament that are accepted by the Church Councils, as Prophetic Books became the base of faith and church life. Any teaching that is not in agreement with the teachings of these Holy Books is considered a heresy.

II. Who Are the Apostolic Fathers?

The era of the Apostolic Fathers began in the middle of the first century and these Fathers followed the Apostles of our Lord immediately. The teachings of the Apostolic Fathers are truly considered as a direct reflection of the Apostles preaching. The Apostolic Fathers were either directly connected to the Apostles themselves or they received their teachings from the Apostles through the disciples lives.

In reality, the term "Apostolic Fathers" was not known in the primitive church, however, it is expressed first by scholars in the seventh century and it refers to the churches Fathers who were direct disciples for the Apostles, or saw them, or received teachings and instructions from the Apostles themselves.

The writers in this era included St Clement the Roman, St Ignatius of Antioch, St Polycarp the Martyr, The Bishop Papias of Hierapolic, Higyspoc, Hermas author of the Didache and the author of the Barnabas Letter. Although these writings are very rare, they have a great importance. The scholars

examined and studied these writings extensively regarding Theology, Liturgy, and Church Rituals. The Apostolic Writings focused on patronage in Christianity and their style, which is very similar to the style of writing of the New Testament, especially the style of the Epistles.

1) **St Clement, the Roman**

   The first of our Apostolic Fathers is St Clement who was the third Bishop of Rome. He lived in the last fourth of the first century. He wrote his Epistle to the Church of Corinthians when he heard about the presence of envy and quarreling among the people there regarding the trial of some people denying the authority of their local bishops. He wrote encouraging them to work toward settlement with love and discipline.

   St Clement succeeded in his Epistle to the church to end the dispute and peace settled in the Corinthians Church. This Epistle which sought peace was one of the books read in Sunday Divine Liturgy during the days of Bishop Dyonisios of Corinthians (170 AD). Also, there is a sermon related to St Clement, which is considered the oldest sermon in history. It dates to 150 AD. This sermon discussed the moral diligence, which every Christian must practice in the world.

2) **St Ignatius of Antioch**

   St Ignatius had seven Epistles written in the days of Emperor Tarjan (98 AD-117 AD). These Epistles reflect the life and discipline in the Church at that time in addition to the dogma of the Church.

   Four Epistles were written by St Ignatius while he was in Azmer to Ephesus, Magnisia, Trallow, and Romans. The other three Epistles St Ignatius wrote while in Terosas to Philadelphia, Smyrna, and St Polycarp the Martyr. These Epistles are characterized by the spirit of deep piety towards the Lord Jesus Christ and the desire for death to be in Heaven with Him. These Epistles incorporated Christian unity and fighting of heresies.

3) **St Polycarp, the Martyr**

   St Polycarp was the Bishop of Azmer. He was born in 70 AD and was a disciple of St John the Apostle. St Polycarp wrote his Epistle to the Phillipians. The first twelve chapters of this Epistle fought the heresy of Markion. The last two chapters expressed the love of St Polycarp to his friend St Ignatius of Antioch. St Polycarp visited Rome and met her Bishop Inistos (154 AD). St Polycarp was martyred on 22 February 156 AD.

4) **St Papias of Virigia (Herapolis)**

   St Papias was the disciple for St John the Apostle and a friend for St Polycarp the Martyr as mentioned by St Irinaos in his Book against heresies. St Papias wrote five Books, which are explanations of the Lord's sayings in which He depended on the Holy Gospel according to St Mark and St Matthew.

5) **Letter of Barnabas**

   The author of this letter is unknown. It dates back to the end of the first century. It was written as a dialectical writing against the Jews. The perspective of the writer was "Jews are sinners as they obeyed the devil in Christian Crucifixion." The style of the writer is similar to the Jewish style of writings in the late centuries as he presented a comparative study between the way of darkness and the way of light. A similar comparison is done in the Book of Didache which is called Life and Death.

6) **<u>Didache</u>**

The Didache or "the Teachings of the Twelve Disciples to the World" is a small book that concerns moral ethics, church's rituals such as baptism, fasting, praying, Agpeya, Euchrist, and the apostles and prophets. This book was published recently in 1883 AD. The scholars suggest that this book dates back to 60 AD before the Holy Gospels.

7) **<u>The Shepherd of Hermas</u>**

Although the Book of Shepherd of Hermas is considered one of the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, the church views it as a Apocryphal Vision as it consists of groups of visions that Hermas saw by two heavenly creatures. The first was an old woman that was a symbol of the church and the second was an angel who appeared to Hermas as a shepherd.

Hermas himself was a slave sold in his early life to a rich woman in Rome called Roda. According to Montary's Manuscript, Hermas was a brother of the Bishop "Pios", the Bishop of Rome (140-150 AD). The book was written at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century. The main goal of the book is preaching with repentence. He taught that the Christian who falls in sin following baptism must repent. Also this book presented a description about the life in the Roman Church during the first half of the second century.

8) **<u>The Apologists</u>**

While our Apostolic Fathers cared about the internal life of the Church, our Apologists worked on the borders that separate the Church from the world as they defended the Christian faith against idolaters, assaults, and misunderstandings of the principles of the Christian faith. The Apologists presented the Christian faith representing the correct dogma and truth of monotheism. Most Apologists writings were a call for the governmental authorities in Rome to study Christianity and know its truths.

A) The first Apologist is Koadratis who wrote his Apologia to Hedrian the Emperor during his stay in Asia Minor in 123 and 124 AD. Unfortunately a small part of his Apologia remains and is mentioned in the history of Yousabious of Casera.

B) The second Apologia is for Arstidis who was a philosopher from Athens during the time of the Emperor Mark Orilios. This Apologia discussed the different facts of Christianity and stated that Christian dogma is the "unique truth."

C) St Justin Martyr was a philosopher born in Naples in Palestine. His parents were idolaters. He was taught in different schools of philosophy and when he recognized that all the philosophies learned were not enough to satisfy his soul, he converted to Christianity. He established a school in Rome during the time of Antonios Pios. He was martyred in 163 AD. The first Apologia was fighting against assaults directed toward the Christians and presented the facts of Christianity in which he believed. He also presented a complete description of baptism and Eucharist.

   The second Apologia is shorter than the first and is considered a complementary one to the first. St Justin dialectical dialogue with Trifo who was a Jewish scholar continued for two days and represented a Christian call for Jews to worship the Lord Jesus Christ who completed the Law.

D) Tatian was one of St Justin's disciples in Rome. He was originally from Syria. His famous book, "Diatessaron" presented harmony among the four Holy Gospels. Tatian wrote another book, which presented his dialogue to the Greeks fighting idolatry.

E) Athenagoras of Athens wrote an Apologia in 177 AD in which he defended Christians against idolater's assaults who compared Christianity with atheism. He wrote another book about the Resurrection.

F) Theophilus of Antioch authored an Apologia to Otolilgoc defending Christianity against atheism (180 AD).

G) Minosis presented a dialogue among three friends in Osita discussing the suppositions of the Christian faith.

H) Letter of Diagenetis was a manuscript describing the superiority of the Christian dogma over that of the Jews and idolaters.

III. The Writings of the Martyrs

These writings describe the events of martyrdom of the martyrs to be read in their remembrances in the Church. The writings are commonly derived from witnesses of the martyrdom. Examples of these writings are The Martyrdom of Polycarp (155 AD), St Justin and his fellows (163-167 AD), Letter of Churches of Lion, Vinna to the Churches of Asia (177 AD) describing the persecution and torture in France and Sylistian Martyrs in 180 AD.

IV. Writings Against Heresiarchs

The scholar Yousabious from Casera mentioned that the writings against Heresiarchs were plentiful but unfortunately most of these writings were lost. Only one complete manuscript exists for St Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lion "Against Heresiarchs." St Irenaus was the greatest scholar in Theology in the second century. He is referred to as "The Father of Church Tradition." He was born in Asia Minor and was a disciple of St Polycarp. St Irenaeus was ordained a priest in Lion and after that became a Bishop for Lion in 77 AD during the persecution of Mark Orilios. St Irenaeus defended against Montanians Heresy and shared in the determination of the time of the Resurrection Feast. His book did not include his defense against Gnosticism only but also it is considered the base of Christian Theology and dogma. St Irenaeus also has another book "The Proof of Apostolic Preaching" which presents a brief description for apostolic dogma.